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REVIEW OF DEVELOPMENTS PERTAINING TO THE PROMOTION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Information received from indigenous organizations

The present document contains information received from an indigenous organization relating to item 4 of thc provisional agenda.

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I. THE RIGHT TO JUST AND EQUITABLE DEVELOPMENT

1. To indigenous eyes, human and social development is merely a long natural and dialectic historical process which has been evolving in accordance with economic and social laws. In other words, each development model is conditioned by the method of production and the form of distribution of wealth in all historically determined societies.

2. From time immemorial, that is, since life appeared on Earth, man has first needed to feed and clothe himself and to have a roof over his head, before practising a religion or engaging in politics. The constantly changing nature of development does not depend on anyone's will, nor can it be decreed through resolutions. Nevertheless, man can and should cultivate the laws of society and consciously apply them in planning the economy and in making rational use of natural resources in the service of man and his dignity.

3. The indigenous civilizations of America, on the basis of collective ownership of the land, had already reached high levels of social development for their time, because they knew how to plan production and consumption, using nature's resources rationally and reasonably. This form of social organization showed that there was neither poverty nor exclusion in our ancient societies, since the distribution of wealth generated by collective labour was distributed in keeping with the principle of to each according to his work and from each according to his capacity.

4. Five centuries after the destruction of our ancestors' method of production, we have come back to the question of "to be or not to be". Today, more than ever, States have given in to the globalization movement; they have abandoned their economic function in organizing their systems of production, and have surrendered the exercise of their inalienable and universal right to fair and sustainable development, inherent in all peoples, to the blind forces of the market, in other words, to the gluttony of powerful transnational corporations.

5. Following the logic of the absolute law of free competition - absolutely free to move in constant pursuit of maximum profits and capital accumulation - natural resources are being irrationally exploited, the wealth of the countries of the Third World is being taken over unlawfully, indigenous peoples are being despoiled of their lands and State-owned companies are the object of all-out privatization.

6. In open defiance of General Assembly resolutions 41/128 of 4 December 1986 and 2626 (XXV) of 24 October 1970, which proclaim the right to development as an inalienable right, the wealthy countries continue, through the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), to impose an ultraliberal model on the poor countries as an absolute and universal conception of the modern world.

7. International financial capital investors, protected by an economic policy devised in the context of the new international economic order, have once again installed a neo-colonial-type model in North-South relations. At the dawn of the new millennium, no economic, social or cultural problem, regardless of its dimension or importance, can elude the voracious

transnational corporations, with their webs spun round the production and distribution of goods and services, which decide on the mobility or the closure of companies, or mass layoffs, and indulge in frenzied speculation on the stock market, leading to a cyclical and structural crisis with serious consequences for collective peace and security.

8. It is ironical that, while the transnational corporations with their headquarters in highly developed countries have plundered fabulous natural resources from poor countries, left traditional economies in ruins, mutilated Mother Earth, polluted the air and the water, despoiling millions of the marginalized and the poor, the wealthy countries have increasingly cut down on their contribution to international cooperation and have quite simply decided to close their borders to the movement of persons.

9. This chaotic and devastating industrialization model shows that the economic thinking prevalent in the world is incompatible with the very notion of the development of the human personality and runs counter to the perception of indigenous peoples in the context of production relations.

10. The selfishness of the wealthy countries and the inconsistency of their social development policies have been and will continue to be a major obstacle to implementing the international development strategy to achieve the agreed goal: wide-ranging international cooperation between rich and poor States, permanent sovereignty of peoples over their natural resources, viewed as a basic requirement for exercising the right to self-determination, and regulation of the activities of the transnational corporations which covet the resources that the western world regards as strategic for its development.

11. In an attempt to justify a model that is both anarchic and aberrant, the neo-liberal economists and the experts of the World Bank, IMF and the development agencies placed a purely business bias on the notion of development which has led to the growth of production and consumption in quantitative terms without taking into account other parameters such as life expectancy, infant mortality, illiteracy, per capita income, health, etc.

12. The important thing is for man and human dignity to form the basis of sustainable and comprehensive development so that four essentials can be reconciled, namely: rationally planned economic growth, social justice, a sustainable environmental policy and a fair distribution of wealth.

13. In the opinion of indigenous nations, these parameters are indispensable requirements for putting an end to the chaos and disorder in the international economic system and for restoring the sustainable development and balance between man and nature that was involuntarily broken in 1492 by the conquest and colonization of the Americas.

II. EXTREME POVERTY AND UNEQUAL DEVELOPMENT

14. The scourge of poverty and crushing debt stem from the unequal and anarchic development of the prevailing system and the unfair distribution of wealth. Poverty should not be considered the fate of history. Contrary to the assertions of Malthusian theory, Mother Earth, who has given us life, is able to feed all her children.

15. The process of globalization worldwide has come at a time when poverty and the impoverishment of the great majority of people in the world have reached tragic levels in the midst of the overproduction and opulence of the countries of the North and the dominant elites of the South.

16. More than two decades of the structural adjustment programmes imposed by the IMF on poor countries which are nothing but transmission belts to carry trade liberalization forward, the deregulation of the financial system and the looting of natural resources have continued to swell the army of the poor and those who are excluded from the prosperity of the new international economic order.

17. It is disappointing to see the lack of political will of the wealthy countries and the lack of consistency in their policies in the struggle to eradicate the poverty and the racial discrimination that do violence to the most vulnerable sectors of society and form a special threat to the survival of the indigenous peoples.

18. The chasm between rich and poor has rarely yawned so deep. According to UNDP's Human Development Report 1998, the richest sector of the world's population consume 46 per cent of all meat and fish and 58 per cent of total energy, accounts for 74 per cent of all telephone lines, consumes 85 per cent of all paper and owns 87 per cent of all existing vehicles. The poorest sector consumes less than 5 per cent of meat and fish, only 1.1 per cent of the paper and owns less than 1 per cent of the vehicles.

19. At this rate of exclusion and marginalization, the criteria or indicators used at the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995 to define poverty no longer reflect the cruel reality. Only the poor themselves know what hunger means - when a hungry man does not have even a morsel of bread to eat, or a poncho against the cold or an aspirin to take away a headache.

20. According to a World Bank 60 country-survey lasting 10 years, with 60,000 accounts by the poor about their poverty, 56 per cent of the world's population lives in poverty: 1,200 million persons currently live on less than one dollar a day and a further 2,800 million live on two dollars a day (see Le Monde, 30 March 2000).

21. In actual fact, the many facets of poverty are much more complex and it is difficult to ascertain the numbers of the poor. It is estimated that 1,500 million persons live in poverty and some 60 per cent of them in extreme poverty. Of the rural population overall, indigenous peoples represent more than 80 per cent of the total poor and extremely poor in the developing countries and 61 per cent in the case of Latin America and the Caribbean. Of a total of 190 million children and adolescents people living in Latin America, half of them live in a situation of critical poverty.

22. In Russia, which is in transition towards a market economy, the new oligarchs have appropriated the wealth of the Soviet people and now control over 50 per cent of the economy, channel IMF loans to their own companies or private banks and, with complete impunity, transfer colossal sums to tax havens.

23. In contrast, 15 million people go hungry. In 1996, poverty already afflicted 35 million people and three-quarters of the population lived below the poverty line, while the indigenous peoples were condemned to poverty as a result of neo-liberal reforms and the misappropriation of public funds.

24. The voices of the poor cry out against the lack of political will on the part of States in the fight to eradicate poverty and forcefully denounce widespread corruption in high places in States and public and private institutions, undermining the principles of democracy, equity and social justice.

25. In the world today there are more than 1,000 million illiterates, 4,000 million poor, 250 million children who work in order to survive, 130 million without the right to education, 100 million who live on the streets and 12.5 million under-fives who die of malnutrition and curable diseases.

26. The World Health Report 1995 stresses the dramatic future of young children. In the developing world, it says, 12.2 million children under five die every year from illnesses caused by air and water pollution. At the present time, 150 million children are suffering from acute malnutrition; a further 260 million suffer from anaemia and vitamin deficiency and the majority die for the lack of a few cents.

27. Meanwhile, the economic and military powers spend over 700 million dollars every day on manufacturing weapons of mass destruction. The cost of a single nuclear bomb is equal to the education budget of 23 developing countries. With a sum equivalent to the cost of a combat tank, schools could be built for 30,000 pupils.

28. But, in accordance with the blind and irrational law of the sacrosanct market economy, the wealth in the hands of the three wealthiest persons in the world is greater than the total gross national product of 48 developing countries. Lastly, there is an overriding need to transform the present international economic order, which is deeply unfair, absolutely unsustainable and morally reprehensible.